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Design Drama:

AIA's Peck's Bad Boy Is Alfred Kastner

By HOWARD FARBEE

Alfred Kastner is the "Peck's bad boy" of the AIA.

The German-born architect, a Northern Virginian the past five years, describes himself as non-conforming in practice, and outspoken about it.

These aren't the qualities that endear one to others in a trade organization; but it is thoroughly American in the "damn-the-torpedoes" tradition.

SOME TARGETS of Kastner's no-uncertain-terms, are:

- Those who do not use land as a "heritage." Buildings should be "incidents" accenting the landscape. "The rat-race type" of architectural wax works is to be avoided; there are just too many of (these); — many of recent vintage — that are candidates for the redevelopment junk yard."

- The architect who does not "take new looks at everything in a society of constant change. Contemporary planning is no longer the bed-fellow of precocious and inhibited architecture."

- "Some young twerp" who is telling architects what to design, "thinking in terms of his childhood and what was nice then... this is what they are fostering on the public."

KASTNER BELIEVES few of the people determining plans have the professional know-how — especially in school construction. He said schools can be built less expensive than they are now, on a growing, modular plan.

His Atlantic Research Corp. project is an example. Kastner said. The plant cost less per area to build than many county schools; and it can grow easily as needed, not in mere multiples of square feet, but as part of a whole complex.

ARC grew from 50,000 square feet to 90,000 in the first phase; recently, in the second phase to 250,000; and to a "now conceived intermediate goal" of 650,000 square feet.

The building was allowed to be built because the men behind the firm were interested and were ready to listen to another architect with an idea. In addition to being an architect, Kastner, is a doctor of engineering, but doesn't like to admit the fact.

HE CAME TO this country from Hong Kong in 1925 where he built a hospital. (Kastner has completed a fascinating study on the history of hospitals.)

He also spent several years studying the effect and lasting ability of rays — including strontium 90. He says designers now don't take these fallout rays into consideration when planning new schools.

Other highlights of his career include:

- In theatrical design work in New York in 1929 he won an international contest for a Russian state theatre and opera house.

They must have liked it because he got paid in a heap of gold coins.

- A year later he came in second in designing a Russian Parliament building. The winner — Stalin's son. ("They are like that, too, over there," he commented.) He designed the building without a Lenin statue, but the Reds added one.

- In Philadelphia, in 1933, his limited dividend housing with a pool and community facilities was a trend-setter, and looks new today.

- He designed Hightstown (now Roosevelt) N. J. from scratch — "the houses are incidental, the gardens beautiful;" and Albany, Ga., which was wrecked in 1937 by a hurricane.

- He designed, in 1940, the Raymond Clapper house that his widow described as "remarkable" in her recent book, "One Lucky Woman."

HE NOW HAS WORK in some 15 states, a great deal in this area, including:

- His assistant, Tony Zala, awarded the National Capital Award as the best young architect last year, has patented a mylar projection device for interior planning that is having tremendous federal reception — something like \$100 million in structures, including the CIA

- An 8,000-acre development in nearby Maryland being designed from a leisure time use, and a similar 8,000-acre project near Quantico.

- A 100-acre home-professional center near Tyson's Corner.

- Rutherford for DISC, Inc., Annandale, some 500 homes.

- The Americana Motel, using a new office ownership concept, on Rt. 1 near the Pentagon.

- The Heritage Inn in Williamsburg, the first phase of a 34-acre development.

Kastner lives with his wife at 21 West Trove Drive, Belle Haven.



ALFRED KASTNER
...architectural innovator

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